

Good afternoon, and welcome to the second in a series of hearings the Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs plans to hold on U.S. foreign policy toward Iran.

In this time of saber-rattling and bellicose invective, I thought it appropriate for us to take a different approach.

In that vein, we are undertaking a thoughtful and comprehensive study of the Iranian people and their society; the recent history of U.S. / Iran diplomacy (and what lessons can be learned from those negotiations); and the possible options for dealing with Iran, along with the consequences of those options.

And my hope and goal is to undertake this deliberative study before any irreversible decisions are made. In other words, Congress needs to do everything it can to inform itself about all aspects of Iran before it's too late.

Today's hearing is titled, "Negotiating with the Iranians: Missed Opportunities and Paths Forward."

Most people are aware the United States has had no official relations with Iran since the Islamic Republic was founded in 1979. We have imposed unilateral and multilateral economic, trade, and technological sanctions. We have designated Iran a sponsor of terror.

However – and unbeknownst to most Americans – there have been numerous attempts to maintain contact and dialogue with Iran by every Administration, regardless of political party, since relations officially broke some 30 years ago.

We have before us today a terrific panel of witnesses who can help pull back the curtain and share with the Congress and with the American people what happened in these negotiations.

We have top former diplomats, National Security Council officials, and State Department experts – the very people who personally negotiated with the Iranians; witnesses who can share their direct experiences and insights.

I believe this unique and unparalleled history lesson will be incredibly useful, in particular by offering lessons from which we can learn as we move forward in dealing with Iran.

Some of the general outlines of what occurred are known, but much of what transpired has remained shrouded in secrecy. Our hearing today aims to lay out the historical record and inform discussion going forward.

We'll explore the relations between the U.S. and Iran just prior to September 11, 2001. We'll hear from those who negotiated with Iran after 9/11 and about the cooperation that Iran provided in the effort to drive the Taliban out of Afghanistan.

We'll also examine whether, along with the way, there were missed opportunities to make progress on broader issues of contention between the U.S. and Iran:

For example, what effect did President Bush's 2002 labeling of Iran as part of the "axis of evil" have on Iranian cooperation and willingness to negotiate?

Why did the Administration not react positively to entreaties by the Iranians to make progress on broader diplomatic efforts in the wake of the Afghanistan cooperation?

And what's the significance of the May 2003 fax that the Iranians reportedly sent through third-party intermediaries offering to put a whole host of issues on the table – an offer the Bush Administration apparently refused to even acknowledge?

As an Oversight Subcommittee of the United States Congress, we intend to educate ourselves on policy alternatives and to fully consider the short- and long-term consequences as we fulfill

our constitutional responsibilities in the coming months.

Our relationship with Iran is complex, to say the least, and involves a multitude of security, economic, and diplomatic facets.

We have many serious concerns with Iran, including its nuclear enrichment program, its relationship with Hamas and Hezbollah, and its relations with certain Iraqi militia groups. Still, as our witness at a previous related hearing noted, areas of serious concern to the United States such as Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan, terrorism, and proliferation all are impacted by Iran in one way or another.

The question now is how best to go forward. The Administration has put conditions before any broader talks with Iraq can commence. We'll hear from our panelists today what the lessons of this recent history tell us about whether this is the best course forward and we'll learn of other possible diplomatic alternatives.

Together with the fact that the United States has well recognized military strength, realistic, hard-nosed diplomacy helped end the Cold War, stop Libya's nuclear ambitions, and even led to some progress with North Korea, a country that has already exploded a nuclear weapon.

If the Berlin Wall could fall and the Cold War could end without World War III, my hope is that the same will be able to be said with respect to our policy towards Iran five or ten years from now.

Thank you, and I now yield to the Rep. Shays, the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee.